DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 764 EA 015 953

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TITLE The Marriott Secret: Put Your Staff First. The Endpaper.
PUB DATE Feb 83
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Viewpoints (120)
JOURNAL CIT Executive Educator; v5 n2 p46,38 Feb 1983

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration; *Employee Attitudes; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Job Satisfaction; *Job Training; Opinion Papers; Organizational Climate; Service Occupations; *Success
IDENTIFIERS Marriott Corporation; PF Project

ABSTRACT

The key to the success of the Marriott Corporation is its emphasis on employee satisfaction and training. Because it is a service industry, the Marriott Corporation relies on the quality of the contact between its employees and its customers. Education is also a service industry in which this contact is vitally important. Some ingredients of Marriott's employee-centered approach which might be adaptable to education are: (1) having a well-defined product and a detailed employee training program; (2) allowing opportunities for employee growth and advancement; (3) having managers who understand their employees and who learn the jobs that their employees do; and (4) encouraging effective employee-management communication. The principles of planning, sound management, hard work, fair treatment, and training can create success in any business, including education. (DC)

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The Endpaper

by
J.W. Marriott Jr.

The Marriott secret: Put your staff first

IF YOU'VE EVER stayed in a Marriott Hotel, you've probably noticed the customer satisfaction card propped open on the desk in your room. That card is a critical element of the Marriott operation—and it leads me to some thoughts that apply as much to administering schools as to managing hotels.

That card is a vital link between us and our customers: It asks you what you like or don't like about our service. And *service* is what we're all about. Marriott—a multibillion dollar, international corporation involved in restaurants, food service, theme parks, and resorts in addition to hotels—owns no patents or innovative equipment. Instead, our company's success depends on the service we offer, which in turn depends on our employes. More than anything else, our survival as a company is tied to our 110,000 employes and how each one of them interacts with each of our customers.

Because our people average more than 8 million individual customer contacts a day, the Marriott Corp. puts employes first—ahead of management, ahead of shareholders, ahead even of customers. Without the favorable impressions our employes make on people, we would have no customers, no managers, and no stockholders.

J.W. Marriott Jr. is president and chief executive officer of the Marriott Corp. This article is adapted from a lecture he presented to George Washington University's School of Education and Human Development, Washington, D.C.

What does all this have to do with school administration? In simple terms, education, too, is a service industry. It depends on satisfied, well-trained employes who know that management considers them vital to success. Naturally, educating children is an infinitely more complex undertaking than making beds, cleaning rooms, or putting out a meal for a hundred people in an hour's time. Nevertheless, success in schools also depends on a satisfactory relationship between school employes (teachers and other staff members) and the customers (students and their parents). With that in mind, let me outline how Marriott Corp. strives to develop a positive working climate for our employes, with the goal of ensuring a positive and profitable relationship between employes and customers. Our approach might suggest some lessons adaptable to school administration.

1. *We have well-defined systems for delivering our product and for teaching people how to operate the system.* We start with a *standard* product, which ensures consistency and allows us to measure performance. Having standards—such as a recipe card for an omelette, a Big Boy hamburger, or a complete Polynesian dinner—takes the guesswork out of the job. And having standards not only makes for a consistent product, it also influences what it costs us to prepare the product, how we purchase supplies, and how we set daily production schedules.

Along with standards must come detailed employe training to support the system. We have instruction manuals for everyone—bellhops, waitresses, hosts and hostesses, hotel front-desk personnel, housekeepers, and so on. These manuals tie into individual development programs of tasks to be mastered, and a trainer signs off on each task when a new employe completes it satisfactorily. The trainee cannot take over full responsibility for the job until the trainer approves the work.

In schools, it might not be so simple to define the tasks to be performed; nevertheless, school administrators can work to give their people the time and training needed to do the job well. Obviously, as people become more skilled, their productivity and their job satisfaction improve.

2. *We include employes in opportunities for expansion and growth.* In the last 20 years, our company has grown an average of 20 percent a year. This growth has opened opportunities for Marriott people at all levels. Dozens of our hotel general managers started out as hourly employes, and most of our restaurant and airline kitchen managers started as kitchen workers. The motivating influence, then, is that an hourly employe in an entry-level job can see bosses, unit managers, or even a company vice-president who started their careers at the lowest levels, too. The point that school people might keep in mind: Never squelch excitement or enthusiasm by systematically denying opportunities for growth to your people. Rather, encourage all employes to work to their full potential.

3. *Our managers set the work climate.* Employes need to know that their boss understands them and what they do. So, our managers constantly are in the field observing, inspecting, teaching, motivating. And they learn to *do* the various tasks performed by the employes they manage: Housekeeping managers learn to make beds and find out what it's like to clean from 15 to 20 guest rooms a day; restaurant managers work the breakfast grill to experience having a dozen waitresses yelling at once for eggs over easy and bacon cooked just right. Our managers, in short, learn what it's like in the trenches—and because they do, they value the contribution of each individual employe they manage.

Senior management, too—from my office on down—follows the rule that the generals occasionally should be in the field. From continuous on-the-floor experience, our executives and managers determine how we are meeting—or perhaps more importantly, how we are *not* meeting—the needs of our cus-

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tomers and employes. That personal concern is what we consider the key to success. Personally, I believe most school executives know and follow this rule, too; but those who don't shouldn't be surprised to see their employes burn out.

4. *We encourage effective employe communications and participation.* A good working climate dictates that people know how they are doing and what they can do to improve and be promoted. Employe performance at Marriott is discussed monthly. But the communication doesn't go just from management to employe; upward communication from employe to management is even more important. Our managers have regular and frequent rap sessions with their people, finding out what frustrates them and what we can do to improve the climate in which they work. We also ask employes to help us solve productivity and service problems in their work area.

The essence of this communication, I believe, is the recognition it gives to people. They know we really want them to participate in the decisions that affect them. It's clear why this understanding is important to us: We can do little to improve productivity through capital investment in our business. We haven't found a machine that can make a bed or clean a bathroom, any more than educators have found a machine that can replace a teacher. And similarly, we—like you—can't do much to improve employe satisfaction unless we know what's troubling our people.

The interest of Marriott Corp. in its employes doesn't end with these four points. We also have extensive systems to guarantee each employe fair treatment—allowing an employe to go all the way up the ladder to my office to settle a concern, if necessary. We conduct annual employe attitude surveys through an anonymous questionnaire. We have a system of profit sharing. And we work to make our people proud of the product we sell and proud of the success of their company.

These principles—planning, sound management, hard work, fair treatment, and training—are ingredients for success that can work in any business. I believe they can help improve education, too. And you won't need customer satisfaction cards to prove it. ■